

The Cross-Cultural Sublime

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Thesis Advisor

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### Abstract

This Honors Thesis is an exploration of a subject which I entitled "The Cross-Cultural Sublime." This subject was first committed to canvas in my painting of April - May 1997 of the same title.

For this project I applied for a Creative Arts Grant. The textual parts of this grant and a reflection upon the grant application process comprise the first part of this document.

An exhibition catalogue comprises the second part of this document.

For this project, a total of ten finished works were completed along with numerous studies, notes, and sketches. The bulk of the work consists of oil on canvas while two works are watercolor on rice paper.

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### Applicant Information

The goal of this project is to create a minimum of twelve pieces on both canvas and paper using oil paint and Chinese brush and ink. This work will be thematically related to the topic of "The Cross-Cultural Sublime" and will be featured in an on-campus show at the end of Spring Semester. This project will also satisfy class credit for the thesis project required by the Honors College (HONRS 499).

I, Patrick Page, am a fifth-year senior with majors in History and Art Education (printmaking specialization). I also have minors in Painting and Art History. I will graduate at the conclusion of Spring Semester this year.

I have had experience in creating a body of work based upon a central theme. This past summer, I was involved in the "Art in Italy" trip, conducted through the art department, and chaired by Marilynn Derwenskus and Nina Marshall. For the class credit portion of the trip, I constructed a body of work, based upon our travel, on both canvas and paper with oil and acrylic paints. Additionally, I did some drawings and on-site sketches. Although we had some time "in-country" to do work, the majority of the work was created independently at home. In totality, we had about three months to create and then properly present (frame, matte, etc.) our body of work.

The theme, "Cross-Cultural Sublime," is a synthesis of ideas which have interested me. Originally, a number of source items such as Japanese screen painting and Abstract Expressionism had "bumped" my thinking. Accordingly, I played with these ideas and

came up with two separate pieces which encapsulate the first wordings of what would become my topic (illustrations of these are included as Additional Support Materials). For this project, I seek to broaden upon these prior experiments and some earlier dabbling in the media of Chinese brush and ink.

I dare not enmesh myself in this project blindly--I have been reading and seeking to educate my interests in this topic over the past few years. Some valuable experiences have been afforded me in the shows of Japanese Screen Painting (Spring 1996) and the overview of Chinese art, from the National Museum of Taiwan (Summer 1996), both at the Art Institute of Chicago. I have taken courses in both history and art history on contemporary, European, and Asian topics. From the Honors College, I have received a foundation of information about the Western humanities. Furthermore, I have been reading about what various thinkers, such as the painter Robert Motherwell and the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre have stated about the sublime. I have also explored literature which indirectly relates to the topic, such as Jack Kerouac's Satori in Paris.

It is now that I feel prepared to address this topic, and I have worked over the Summer and so far this semester to outline works which illustrate it. The Honors College desires that the Honors Thesis be a capstone of our undergraduate education, and I feel that this project should serve as a capstone of my undergraduate experiences at Ball State.

Since this is my first grant application, I have never received any funds from this office.

## Project Design

### Defining the Sublime

My basic goal for the project, "The Cross-Cultural Sublime," is to paint the sublime. However, as this is not a very concrete description, I will attempt to define the concept of the sublime as I presently understand it and seek to approach it for the purposes of this project. I also forewarn that these ideas are better displayed visually, whereby they appear both simpler and more eloquent.

The sublime is the underlying raison d'etre for the creation of art. It is the assumed given quantity, often with a somewhat ethereal quality to it. It is the spiritual, or lack of, in art. It sets the parameters. There is a German term, Weltanschauung, which roughly translates as one's total perception, perspective, or worldview. The sublime fits into this conception as the why factor.

But there are other elements of the sublime which specifically relate to how the artist approaches composition. The painter, Robert Motherwell, would state about the large works of the New York School of painters, that:

the large format, at one blow, destroyed the century long tendency of the French to domesticize modern painting, to make it intimate....One of the great images [of New York School painting] should be the house-painter's brush, in the employ of a grand vision dominated by an ethical sensibility that makes the usual painter's brush indeed picayune.  
(1)

What Motherwell is getting at, is that artists such as the Impressionists or Henri Matisse had constructed easel paintings which were personable in size and managed nature into a neat and

compact space by the use of little brushes. Nature was controlled by man and on a canvas was even portable. (While of similar size, 19th Century American landscape paintings should be noted for their vast, breath-taking views which contrast to the Impressionist Claude Monet's "bite-able" portions of nature). Furthermore, the New York School's works were not reproductions of images, but the tangible image itself. These artists saw themselves not as copiers but as creators--they did not pick out pieces of nature but rather created as nature did and with the power of large brushstrokes. These artists had taken upon themselves an Existentialist "god quality."

These paintings also functioned as subconscious self-portraits. This raises some kinship with tenets of Asian art. Chinese painters have painted landscapes which functioned as indirect portraits of the artist. Japanese Zen Buddhism has a history of works which utilize the rapid gestural brushstroke--the fixation of the artist's mental energy at a specific moment. Is it pure chance that these ideas are similar? Maybe there are some lucky overlays of ideas; maybe there is some borrowing. Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg cultivated an interest in Asian religious philosophy in their work. Kerouac and Ginsberg also emphasized the idea of the experience through epics such as Kerouac's On the Road. Experience creates art.

Allegorical and religious works were once very popular. Realism replaced these during the 19th Century with a portrait of man at work and at struggle. Romantic poetry and realist paintings each had an inclination to elevate objects, nature, or man. The

object of inclination was the recipient of a generic "god quality." Man praised a higher order in which he was a member. But Cubism and the works of early 20th century poets, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, lack and even attack this quality. Why did this change?

Jean-Paul Sartre argues that the fixation towards god died in France in 1848 as universal manhood suffrage elected a president for the first time. (2) Man was thus elevated until Louis-Napoleon maneuvered his presidency into the throne of an emperor. Now both elevated man and god had each been dethroned. Sartre argues that poetry here loses its *raison d'être* but for the work of the French Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarme. What Mallarme does, instead of writing works which appeal to elevating or beseeching a "god quality," is instead pen works which refer to life as being comprised of chance events. He denies any higher order and he does not seek to connect his poetry to any higher order. This marks a paradigm shift.

The French Ecole des Beaux-Arts had espoused that the goal of academic art was to take the beauty of nature and to further it--this was an appeal to perfection and order. It also indicated the belief that such a higher order existed, as in Plato's world of pure forms. Presently, about a hundred years after Mallarme lived, painters like David Salle paint works which function as mere composites of images--there is no higher order or a beseechment to a higher order. In a delightful furthering of Mallarme's ideas, the creation of a work now justifies its own existence. Man is a creator of images that are worth no more than being only images.



The idea of a journey links many cultures' different ideas of the sublime. Mallarme, Sartre argues in an Existentialist slant, found himself through his work. Jackson Pollock did the same with his drip-painting. The American thinker, John Dewey, argues that art is experience because the process matters as much as the product. What else is experience besides a journey (although for painters such as Pollock and Motherwell, it represents a studied, inward journey)? Chinese landscape paintings have included traceable paths with travellers. Both Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and the Chinese folk-tale, Monkey, A Journey to The West, emphasize the experience of the journey as the most important parts of these religious pilgrimages. Journeys build experience.

The overlapping of these thought patterns and the images related to these factors is where I root my topic of "The Cross-Cultural Sublime."

#### Presenting "The Cross-Cultural Sublime"

Today, art is categorized into a period labeled as Post-Modern. This period is free-spirited in that it looks at past styles as: "been there, done that." One is free to borrow or adhere to anything. One trait of Post-Modernism has been to re-examine past art and its context. My project fits within this Post-Modern perspective because it seeks to re-examine past art as its subject.

I am seeking to create compositions which combine the differing ideas of the sublime into one. I am emphasizing the journey and the idea of experience as a way of reaching fulfillment or the sublime. My compositions will unify the abstract and the

literal image into one composite form. I wish that these composite images evoke both the intangible sublime, and tangible references (such as to the character Monkey, from Monkey, A Journey to The West). The experience of creating and of studying for these images I consider to be as important as the images themselves.

The theme, "The Cross-Cultural Sublime," postulates a substantial idea. The difficulty of the idea unnerves me a bit, but I once happened upon a Georgia O'Keeffe quote which raises my confidence: "Work encourages work." I believe that from our present worldview, we are seeking to rediscover something tangible in the past, or even what some would label the primitive, which answers the question why. The painter Paul Gauguin constructed a work entitled Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? in 1897. It was a Romantic question. By our present date, it seems that Western mankind believes that it has found all of the answers, only it does not know what to believe. Where as Gauguin's piece set forth a dramatic question, my project seeks only to be a studied probing of some of the answers which have been formulated before. In no way do I believe that I myself am close to an answer, hence the importance of the process of creating these works in seeking to arrive at an answer myself.

#### Methodology

My research portion is complete and I have designed the majority of my images. I will construct the frames for the canvases over Winter Break. I will also begin the works on paper over Winter Break. The works will be finished for a showing at the end of Spring Semester.

Endnotes

- 1 Fineberg, Jonathan. Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being.  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995.

-Motherwell is quoted within this work in a discussion on the New York School. Besides being a painter, Motherwell has been renowned for being the "academic" of this movement and he himself has written or been the editor for many works on or about art.

- 2 Sartre, Jean-Paul. Mallarme, or The Poet of Nothingness.  
Trans. Ernest Sturm. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988.

-My citation of Sartre's views here and later in this text are my interpretations of the arguments which he presented throughout this particular work. The phrase "god-quality" is mine and not Sartre's.

### Budget Narrative

The material cost for this project will far exceed the \$200 budget limit. I acknowledge my own obligation to shoulder this additional cost. What follows is a selective listing of various items needed for this project.

Canvas, gesso, two by fours, and plywood are needed for canvas frames. Wood will cost approximately \$80. Two rolls of 52" x 6 yards of canvas will cost \$50. A bucket of good quality gesso will cost \$30.

Twenty-five sheets of Masa paper for the Chinese Brush and Ink drawings will cost \$28. Sumi-E ink will cost \$15. A Giant Sumi-E brush costs \$8.

House painting brushes (for large paintings) will cost \$5-10 each. Smaller brushes will cost \$2 and up.

Tubes of 200ml oil paint cost approximately \$10 each. I find it necessary to keep about 16 assorted colors in stock. These colors are: alizarin crimson, burnt sienna, burnt umber, cadmium orange, cadmium red, cadmium yellow, cadmium yellow pale hue, cerulean blue, cobalt blue, ivory black, phthalo blue, raw sienna, sap green, titanium white, viridian, and yellow ochre.

Presenting the work requires plexiglass (\$10 per 28" x 30" sheet), poplar "one by twos" (\$4 each), screw eyes, wire, foam core (\$5 per sheet) and matte board (\$5 per sheet). One sheet each of matte board, foam core, and plexiglass is needed per framed work on paper. Wood is needed for the sides of each framed work.

Prices have been derived from various art supply catalogs and local stores.

Three Rocks, May 1996.

oil and spray paint on an approximately 16" x 24" canvas.

This work was a successful experiment. My primary goal was to simulate the background of Japanese screen paintings through the use of brass metallic spray paint. The background also features a distant relationship to the simple compositions of later work by the Abstract-Expressionist, Mark Rothko.

The rocks add a literal element to the abstract composition. My goal here was to duplicate the minimal compositions of Japanese screens. The rocks create distance which contrasts with the flat, two-dimensional composition of the rest of the work. The natural shapes of the rocks further contrast with the geometric shapes of the white triangle and other areas.



Cross-Cultural Sublime, May 1997.  
oil on 4' x 5' canvas.

By the time this work was created, most of my thoughts on the topic of "The Cross-Cultural Sublime" had been formulated. This work again combines literal and abstract images as a composite. However, the waterfall stands out as a traditional "window-view," often seen in French works from about the time of the Impressionists until the work of Henri Matisse.

Waterfalls are common in Chinese landscape paintings. Rocks are common in Japanese Zen rock gardens. The brushwork functions as that of the Abstract-Expressionist approach. In that the black brushstrokes are rather self-contained within their individual spatial arrangements, I draw a closer kinship of these with Japanese Zen calligraphy than to the brushwork of Abstract-Expressionists such as Franz Kline.





Works from the "Art in Italy" Exhibition, September - October 1997  
Ball State Art Building Petty Gallery and New Gallery  
(9/8 - 9/19), Ball State International Center (9/22 - 10/12),  
Ball State Emens Auditorium Reception Area (10/13 - 10/19)

top piece:

The Challenge: Human Temporality and Historical Longevity,  
September 1997.

lower piece:

The Romance: Human Presence and the Landscape,  
September 1997.



### Reflection Upon the Grant Application Process

(This is a brief and frank account).

I hope not to scare anyone, but having written a single Creative Arts Grant and two Campus Activity Fund Board grant applications (along with supporting documents and presentations for the later), I can easily state that the Creative Arts Grant created about as much hassle as the others combined. I hope that I am not exaggerating, but it is a frustrating office.

I began writing the Creative Arts Grant in October of 1997. It took longer to write than I expected. Because I also needed to procure the approval of my advisor and my chairman, I decided not to attempt to make the November 1st deadline. According to the paperwork, applications for undergraduate grants are due on the first of any month. The applicant would be notified of the results by the first of the following month.

After spending about \$20 on copies, I turned in my completed application by the December 1 deadline. It was my goal to begin my project over Winter Break. My thoughts were that any grant money would be a bonus since I was completing the project for my honors thesis anyway. Over break I constructed all of my canvases and I saved the receipts. I thought that either I would have a response by January 1 (waiting in my mail box for my return from break) or that I might have to wait until February 1 in case the break disrupted the process.

Time passed and I gave up on hearing anything.

April 1 is April Fool's Day and President Bill Clinton was surprised that the Paula Jones lawsuit was dismissed. When notified, at first he thought that it was a joke. On April 1, I received notification that my Creative Arts Grant was approved. I thought that it...well, not really.

I received full funding of the \$200 which I had requested. This does not always happen, as other recipients whom I had talked to shared with me. This was the good thing. The bad thing was that I was over half-way through my project and that I was setting up my show on May 1. The worst thing was that the notification letter stated that after I returned an acceptance letter, it would take two to three weeks to set up a voucher account so that I could access my funding. I talked to the grant office and they recommended that I not make any purchases or orders before this account was set up.

So currently I am putting some finishing touches on my three uncompleted works and I am typing up this whole thesis book which you, the reader, are holding. As of the moment I initially am typing this line, it is very early in the morning of April 28. I am planning to take slides of my work on Thursday. I am hanging my show on Friday. (Today is Tuesday in case you were wondering). I still have not received any notification from the grant office that my voucher account has been set up. I had lately hoped to at least recover the money which I had spent on copies, but the idea is turning futile before my eyes.

This is a bit of a post-script. The reception for my show was yesterday, but I have heard rumors that I may have been accepted to graduate school. This means that (as a signing bonus) I have a chance to get the grant money. If one ever considers applying for a grant, I would recommend it simply because it is a learning process. It forces one to figure out how to justify their visual work (to what is not necessarily a visually orientated committee) in writing. In a

world in which the value of art is often not recognized (National Endowment for the Arts funding being a case in point), this is a very important skill. Relatively few appreciate the value of contemporary art--it is the obligation of the artist to instill this value in the public. (I think of the role of Robert Motherwell in attempts to justify Abstract Expressionism to even the museum world in the late forties and early fifties). Furthermore, it is an honor to have received a grant. I assume that receiving the money is great too.

Exhibition Catalogue

# The Cross-Cultural Sublime

Patrick Page

May 3 - May 7

Carmichael Building, Honors College  
Opening on May 3, 12:30 - 2 P.M.

Lendemain de chemille en tenue de bal vent dire: papillon  
Mamelle de cristal vent dire: une carafe

Non, monsieur, ne vent pas dire. Rentrez votre papillon dans votre carafe. Ce que Saint-Pol-Roux a voulu dire, soyez certain qu'il l'a dit.

a critic:

Morrow of a caterpillar in evening dress means: butterfly.

Breast of crystal means: a decanter.

Breton retorts:

No, sir, does not mean. Put your butterfly back into your decanter. What Saint-Pol-Roux meant to say, you can be sure he said.

A passage from writings of Andre Breton which I had copied in a sketchbook and which I am unable to attribute to a source at this later date. Likely it is from either Free Rein or Poems of Andre Breton.

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(All works are listed in order that completion was realized.)

Patrick Page

Series Statement (Cross-Cultural Sublime); May 1, 1998.

I have read and marked two statements by Andre Breton in my sketchbook. I find it valuable to share them here.

- \* a critic:  
Morrow of a caterpillar in evening dress means: butterfly.  
Breast of crystal means: a decanter.

Breton retorts:

No, sir, does not mean. Put your butterfly back into your decanter. What Saint-Pol-Roux meant to say, you can be sure he said.

- \* In art one can hardly describe  
The device for catching the blue fox

The wording "Cross-Cultural Sublime" has a good ring to it. Graffiti phrasings seek for concise and pleasing language so that they are remembered.

My work is an interchange of the esoteric and the realist. Though this series tends in imagery to lend itself towards an esoteric flavor, it is also rooted in concrete realism.

This series is a take upon the esoteric drives of painting. This is a history of the mark and I think not exclusively of the works of Pollack, Motherwell, Monet, and Zen. But I also think of Richter and Lichtenstein. The spiritual image after all is only manipulated medium upon a flat surface.

I believe that the two may be reconciled--indeed there is no vitality to either as singularities minus a contrast. One can study towards this esoteric. One can construct the esoteric out of the concrete. I have taken some of the waterfall images from magazines where as all of the rocks I have collected.

There is a purposeful simplicity of appearance to some of the paintings with an unfinished look to others. Mallarme warned not to over-describe the image, to invoke it instead. This is also a slight-of-hand editorial description. It shows that painting is only a process which may be turned on or off. Is this spiritual?

But I strive for an atmospheric, driven quality in each. That intangible is a spiritual quality.

The differences and mixes of approach are intentional. This reflects a refinement of study. Paintings in order to amass worth must be produced out of an atmosphere which is rooted in a study of art and life. I think back to the quote which prefaces Motherwell's published Dedalus sketchbook. I believe that it is by Joyce. It assesses the ultimate value of art by "how deep of a well from which it springs."

The theme of the series revolves around the nameless drive of the sublime throughout the span of art (whether Lascaux or running along the Chicago Metra Lines). This is why I find it hard to reconcile any proddings to explain it because it tends to be something better renewed and felt, rather than worded.

It is just one issue which I explored with my palette as I plan to explore others and this one again.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to first provide a general thank you since I am likely to miss someone. I wish to only cite those whom had a very specific impact upon this project.

I thank Nina Marshall for the help which she lent me in drawing up the Creative Arts Grant application and the aid which she has lent me throughout the past year in arranging meetings with visiting artists. I also owe it to her that I had a cozy location in which to create these paintings. Most importantly, I thank her for the help which she gave me as the advisor for this project and the independence with which she trusted me.

I wish to thank Scott Anderson for his support and valuable discussions as I created what became the first work for this series. I owe a lot to his support and help in my painting class with him last year and also to the continued interest which he has shown in the work of his students.

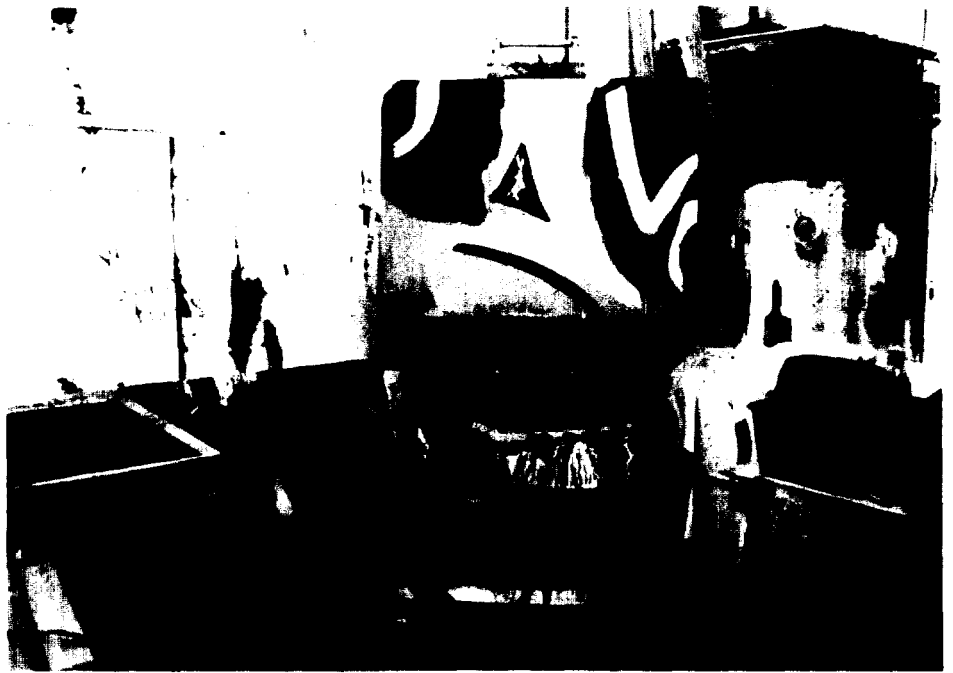
I thank Marilynn Derwenskus for her enthusiasm in pushing students to apply for Creative Arts Grants and for the encouragement which she provides for all of her students.

There are several fellow students whom I could name as helpful for feedback as I worked upon this series. Amy Smith is the one whom looms largest in this category and although we have different ideas about painting, it was always helpful to feel out how the images read to someone else. Ryan Quigley was also very helpful in discussions about various ideas.

I wish to thank the Honors College for the use of their facilities and for their endorsement of my project. The ability to check out library books for the whole year is the greatest gift which they can share.

I must also thank my family for intercepting my art orders to my home address and for their help as I engaged in the difficult process to find good wood for frames. They also deserve great thanks for all of the aid which they provide in transporting and storing these bulky pictures. Both my parents and my sister, Melissa, deserve great thanks.

## The Paintings



selected photographs of works in progress



Cross-Cultural Sublime, 1997.  
Oil on canvas, 4 x 5'.

I painted this last May and it is the last painting which I finished before I traveled to Italy. I had an idea for this painting as part of a series. But I changed the idea drastically at the last minute and this is what I came up with. I may return to the format of the original idea someday.

I struggled to finish this painting. Towards the end, I wished to turn it into a series. I thought about it in Italy but I had to postpone this work to instead pursue the work relating to the Italy trip last summer. I do see the different bodies of work produced for this series and for the Italy series, however, as being closely related. (It is important for me to maintain continuity in the process of my work). Until I continued the series this spring, I had been sketching ideas since last summer. For better or worse I only used one of my original ideas even as a basis for any of these works.

A problem as I renewed the series this spring was that I worried too much about the gravity and format of this work so that it cramped the creation of my recent works.

Looking back on this and my recent works, I think that I may easily state that the larger size of this work allowed me more freedom in my approach to the canvas.

at the reception only



Death of The French Painter. 1998.

Acrylic on wood panel with attached oil palette and three 3 x 5" canvases.

Painting is a matter of maintaining a balance between different conflicts in an approach to a picture plane. The key is to annunciate the purest conflict. The danger is to mistakenly substitute the struggle of composing a picture for the struggle of creation.

French painting following the Impressionists began to tame the painting mystique. Easel paintings became displays of bourgeois comfort. These were paintings which could be painted in gentlemanly suits. It was man who dominated the picture plane and who worked his various formalist concerns upon it. Painting began to lose its quality of danger.

Abstract-Expressionism helped to restore this quality of danger. Furthermore, this American movement hit with the ferocity of a sledgehammer as opposed to the gloss impacts of Americans such as Mary Cassatt upon the European "avant-garde" movements of the period of painting led by Paris.

I may not be done with this painting. I am not always pleased when I look at it.

at the reception only



The Golden Palette, 1998  
Oil on canvas.

Structural use of the brush is a war of painting. I have just finished a book on Robert Motherwell's formative early years of painting. This book discussed his first three elegies and cited the analysis of other authors upon this topic. These people penned off the wall theories about bull testicles and other topics--all the while avoiding what clearly to me is the major feature of the series (not that I discount these other allusions in his work).

I imagine the glory of approaching the picture plane with the same tools for years on end in order to ingest lessons fully and to exploit the tools to every nuance. Kind of like sticking Daruma with a paintbrush. Thin lines are caused by pulling the brush upright while thick patches involve swirls of the brush or mashing it against the picture plane. The simplest creations of the brush are mass and line.

The title came to me. I saw a show of Japanese screens two years ago. The daring and colors in these works surpassed the extremes of Modernist European painting and did so at a quicker pace of 100+ years.

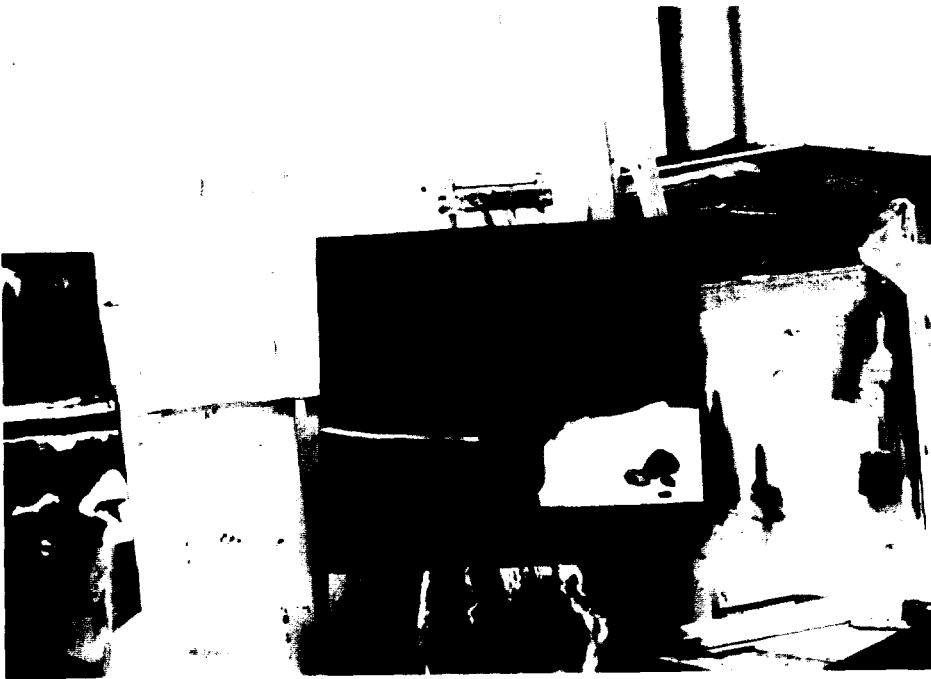
Metallics are funny colors with interesting connotations in art.



Porphyry, 1998.  
Oil on canvas

Porphyry is a rare and dense material which was mined in Egypt and saved for exclusive use of the royalty. I had come across citations of the material more than a few times in my studies at college. The word has always intrigued me. At the Vatican Museums last May, for the first time I saw what the unique purple of porphyry was. One of the outer sarcophagi belonging to Constantine's mother was created of the material. It is a beautiful purple with dark depths.

Funny how the Romans picked up on the exclusiveness of this material used by the pharaohs. Further, I found it interesting how much Egyptian material was present at the Vatican Museums although I should have anticipated this through what I have read in history. Many works were also created with Egyptian characteristics. These two bodies (Roman and Roman Catholic) which today are cited dually in references to the eternal city themselves once attached to others' symbols of unalterable permanence.



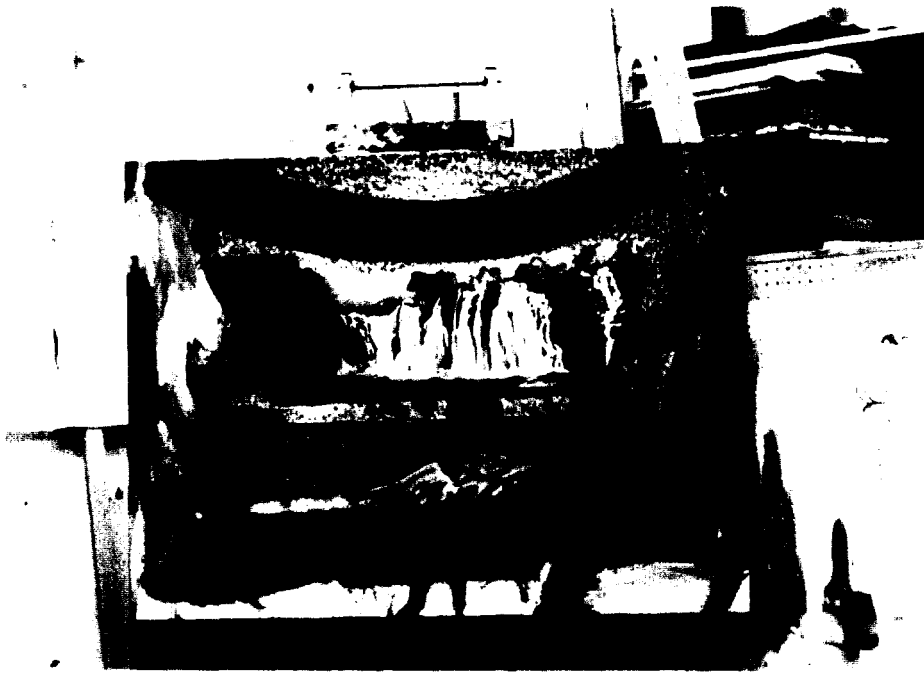
Ten, 1998.  
Oil on canvas.

This painting took me a long time to complete and it is painted over the first-steps of what had been a very different image. Simplicity is illusionary and difficult.

Gauguin's What Do We Come From? Where Are We? Where Are We Going? has a yellow corner which jars with the totality of the work as a whole. It instigates the value of the painting. I enjoy disjointed canvases such as this.

Ten is the basis for the numerical system which we use today. It is the number which serves as the foundation for the technicalities of our numerical and scientific systems which make our explorations possible. Civilizations are often subtly limited by the weakness of the systems which they create to describe the world.

Ten is the number of tools which I used for the making of marks in this painting.



Rain Pan, 1998.  
Oil on canvas.

Part of this painting is very schematic. But I like Lichtenstein a lot. There is something in the collective human experience which is very schematic. Indeed, what experience is personal?

I enjoy the idea of methodology in painting. Maybe all images are schematic and all attempts to find a "pure" image are illusionary. I also enjoy the works of Gerhard Richter.

I spent the most time on this painting and it has changed many times. Looking back in photographs, I think that there may have been points at which I could have stopped--except that it did not feel right. Now it feels right although there still are parts which I hesitate to look at.

People seem to like this work the least. It does stick out from the others, but each does in its own way. I respect this one for the way in which it does achieve uniqueness and I believe that it contributes in a needed way to the complete oeuvre.





My Little Pagoda, 1998.  
Oil on canvas.

An alternative title which I have recently thought of is St. Peter's Hut. In some ways it works towards what I wish to convey although not as strongly as the original title.

Some of the images are incompletely rendered. But two images in it are painted to their fullest detail. It is out of these two details that this work is bound together in conceptual unity.

I started this painting first and then moved on to Rain Pan because I did not like how this one was going. There were many different images attempted on this canvas. The most recent one is that the waterfall from Undermining the Pyramid was originally used in this work. Parts of the final image on this work I had originally thought about for use on Rain Pan. Pieces of this work are also based upon a work from last fall entitled Satori Drawing #4.

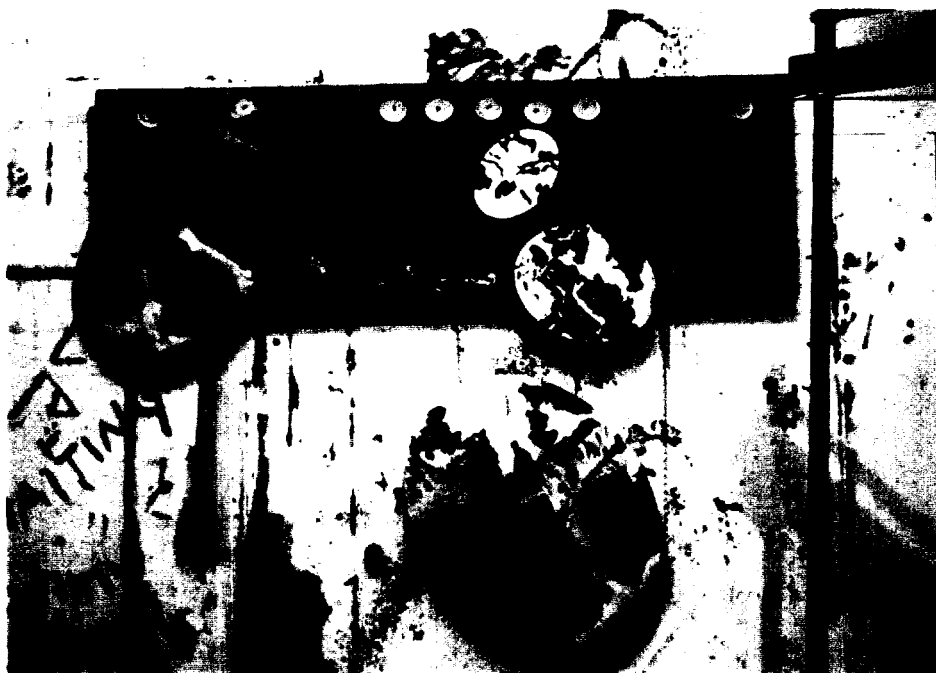


Undermining the Pyramid, 1998  
Oil on canvas.

There was a point in this work at which I looked at the canvas and thought of Miro. The causing factor was unintentional. I was told that forms of the figure were arising in a few of my works. It happened here and on two other paintings. It is only here that I kept this accident.

Obviously pyramids are a symbol of stability. Not only because of history, but because of the use of triangles as a stabilizing element in construction. And who thought of the symbol of delta which uses a triangle as a symbol of change?

The states of water also factor into this painting, as in a few of the other works.



Things I Have Remembered and Seen, 1998.

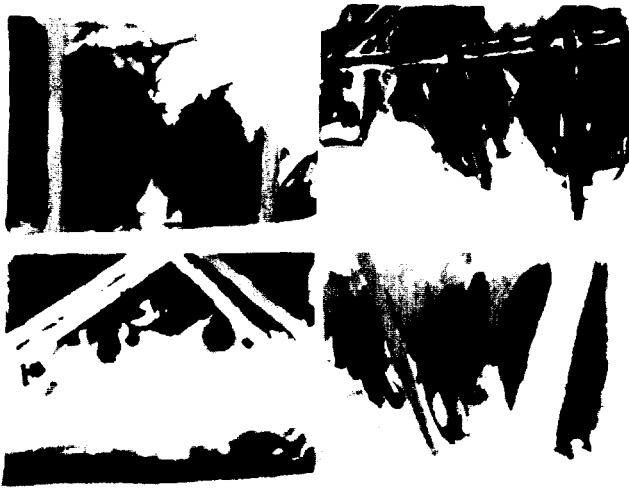
Oil on four canvases mounted to two found boards with other items.

The construction methods of this work are along the lines of what I had first conceived for Cross-Cultural Sublime.

This work plays upon the idea of a painting as an object of completion. It runs along the lines of Warhol's paint-by-number works.

This painting is also about collecting. Humans throughout history have collected. Stonehenge in one perspective is only a collection to which outside properties have been attributed.

not exhibited



Satori Drawing #3, 1997.

Watercolor and acrylic on paper.

Late on Saturday night of Fall Break, I painted four drawings. I tore a sheet of watercolor paper into four parts. I painted the images and then after a pause of a few hours, I worked back into the images with limited details.

It was later that I came again across the word Satori, and it was then that I titled these works.

I wanted to do a work on flat paper like the works which I had been doing in a sketchbook. I think that three of the works turned out well. All four are pictured here. This one is in the lower right corner.

at the reception only



(detail)

A Scholar a Day for Twenty-Two Days, March 1 - March 22, 1998.  
Watercolor on an 18" x 30' roll of kozo rice paper.

I am still trying to master Chinese brush and ink so I tended to rely on watercolor for this work.

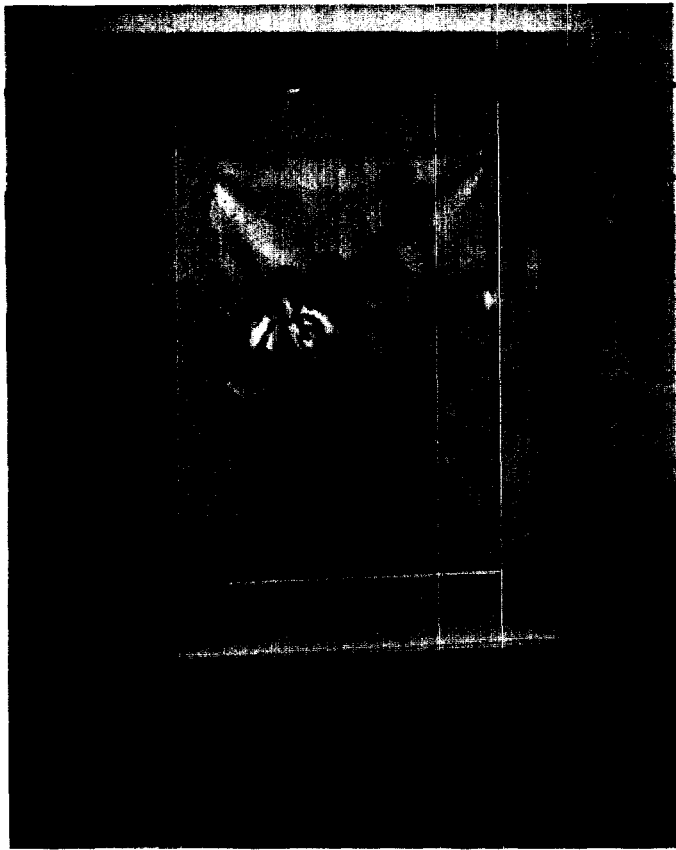
I am not apt at verbalizing the goals of this series, but I think that this work may provide an outlet for some understanding.

For a period until I had filled this roll of paper, daily I copied a different single scholar image. I did this in the Chinese tradition as cited by Xia He in his "Six Canons of Painting" of the 6th Century. One item which he cites may be worded as "transmission of experience of the past in making copies."

I picked these images from a variety of painters. Some of my favorites are copies of Pablo Picasso, Liang Kai, Sesshu Toyo, and Vincent van Gogh. I picked these and the other works because these represent individuals who studied the act of painting. Van Gogh (as argued by some art historians I have read) had no natural talent and instead trusted in his drive to become a painter. His mature works came from a very short period of his life. Picasso is said not to be an inventor as much as a master. He once stated the famous quote, "I don't seek, I find." He studied various academic techniques and then different methods of Modernism. His post-war studies of the masters to me say more about his desire to see how he measured up rather than to a loss of creative impulse (did he ever deviate from traditional subjects at any point in his oeuvre?).

Rice paper is an unforgiving surface. A placed mark stays--there is no covering over a mistake. (Graffiti works tagged with statements such as "I f\*\*ked up" are very exciting). I tried to use this same danger of control in my oils. This work also required that I try to master the methods of the brush. I do not lie, some images are horrible but this studied experience is one which I enjoyed. Renoir once said that the mistakes are what make great paintings great.

at the reception only



Satori Painting #10, April 12, 1998.  
Watercolor and typing on rice paper.

I have been searching for images which function both as documentation and as transcription. This work may delve into these areas.

Last fall I worked on a series of Satori paintings. These are paintings of study and repetition. Moments of channeling and direction in search for a greater direction. I hoped to translate a sense of fluidity in some of these works. I hoped to translate a sense of tactile contact with the medium in others. I intended to create a sense of experience in all of the Satori works.

I read a Jack Kerouac novel in which he attempts to pinpoint exactly when and where during a trip in Paris he achieved Satori. On many of these works I repeated the word Satori as a tag. This is a series loosely related to the Cross-Cultural Sublime Series. But this series relies more on individuality, optimism, rote repetition, and personal study.

This work contains a partial study of a work of Liang Kai.

at the reception only

Patrick Page

Artist's Statement; March 18, 1998, revised May 1, 1998.

My work exists within the following context:

Art is obligated to follow two duties: document the individuality of the artist and document a contribution by the artist to the collective society.

The creation of a work of art accomplishes two things. The first is that an object, which heretofore has not existed, is created. The action of that process of creation consumes both time and matter. Secondly, the creation of an art object adheres the creator to a legacy which contains its own thriving mythology. Even by seeking to deny this legacy the artist is encompassed by it, for this legacy is constantly redefined by the current order. These actions invoke the individuality of the artist.

But I do not believe in a romantic definition of art. Paintings are not alive, they only document that something has existed. Paintings should not be created to serve as medallions which testify to the propensity of the artist. Paintings instead should contribute to a larger dialogue. The dialogue should serve cultural or social issues. What matters is that the individual, by being a consumer of materials (and not a producer of materials), must contribute to the intelligentsia of the society. All individuals at best exist as workers.

My approach to my work is akin to the approach of Jack Kerouac or Zen works. Paintings only document an issue or a fixed moment of time. In all, they only exist as documents which testify generically to the statement: "I am, I acted."

A body of work should document the growth of the creator of the works. It will document the existence of that individual and of the time (although certainly not in the journalistic sense which Emile Zola designated for artists). It testifies as simply and as fully as a combination of the words here and now. But I deny existentialist tenets or any close similarities to Stephane Mallarme in this. Artworks have no higher redemptive powers. They only exist.

In the creation of my imagery I enjoy using materials which deny the connotations of one another: three-dimensional versus two-dimensional parts, the "French Palette" versus the Abstract Expressionist approach, or "spiritual" images of waterfalls taken from mass-produced magazines. Artwork cannot escape the limits of its own materiality. Icons are only painted wood. The legend of Guernica arguably exists more in the story of the work's inception than in its image. Andy Warhol's Disaster Series are more to the point than Pablo Picasso's masterpiece.

As a philosophy of work, Zen intrigues me. Zen places the attainment of Satori at any random moment within the stream of steady daily work. I also am intrigued by St. Francis of Assisi, to whom dedication and labor were core tenets.

My subjects concern mostly the historiography of painting or the human condition, my own included. I seek to utilize different styles as varying palettes both for their visual effects and for the ideological associations which they contain. Our present historical position finds the West at a crossroads which questions both its millennial fears and its 500 year dominance of the world order. The Weltanschauung is being questioned. My work seeks to examine and document this general questioning, and my own existence within this generality. Answers await only in future historical assessments.

### Surviving Post-Modernism

The Post-Modern artist presents him or herself as a victim and states that he or she is passive to what is presented in his or her own art.

Although as an individual, the artist recognizes that the subject of a work must be chosen; the profile of the work is such that the work is merely a product of the society or a tool to be utilized only as a limited argument within the society. I cite the work of Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and David Salle as examples of former part of this statement. Performance art is an example of the later part of that statement.

Modernism was a reaction to conditions. It was a narrowing process in reaction to conditions which created a blaise screen around the perceptions of the artist. Abstract-Expressionism was an exploration of the inwardness of the individual after the crucibles of the World Wars and the Depression had helped to delineate the individual as an isolated element within the society. Cubism was a rejuvenation of art after the challenge of photography. It was an ascertainment of both the plasticity and flatness of the medium.

Modernism was a reductive process which narrowed from an ascertainment of the position of art, to an ascertainment of the individual, and then to an abnegation of the individual as illustrated by the up-rise of Pop Art. As thus, Modernism had attempted to imbue the artist with the spiritual responsibilities which had decayed within the larger social mechanisms which once contained them. Post-Modernism has only ascertained the hollowness which that goal had assumed.

But Post-Modernism has no mantle of its own to carry forth. It is only a gathering of life-rafts after the ship has sunk. It does not postulate, it only reacts. As such, it is only a back water of the pushes of Modernism. Yes, it does have its place and role in history and in progress--but it is only a bridge before a newer stage.

We are confronted with the deadend of what had prolonged the "death" of art. This of course is an argument which only has its place in a Western sense of an inevitable momentum of progress. But perhaps the arguments have only been clouded and confused. Possibly there is a further path not yet explored.

With Post-Modernism is an argument that the art of painting has been pre-empted by mediums such as photography, video art, computer arts, or performance art. It is argued that painting is not the optimal medium for communicating the nuances of the times. Richter's work even mimics the nature of a photographic experience. I argue that this is a falsity created by a Western expectation of progress and evolution. It is a statement which realizes a rush of revolutionary expectations, touched with the rashness which an obligatory passion of revolutionary fervor inspires. True revolutionary thoughts have more of a rational backing.

Instead, what we have found is a standstill of rationale. The inertia which justifies the primacy and drive of painting still exists. What we have is not a break of tradition but a need for a renewal.

Order is the primary inertia of painting. The act of painting recognizes that the painter



exists. This is a creation of order. It recognizes that the materials of painting have been manipulated. This is undeniable for all periods of painting. This may be phrased as I am, I acted. Jackson Pollack recognized this as much as Andy Warhol did. Each took issue with the process of painting in his own work. Marcel Duchamp easily recognized this principle in his justification for his ready-mades (his designations being an establishment of order). The primacy of painting lies in its being a direct process. The individual manipulates the materials directly. Any indirect process loses this touch of the individual.

Painting instills order even without regards to its content. There is a satisfaction even in tipping a bucket of paint (if done for a directed purpose). What gave the painters of Altamira or Lascaux the drive to manipulate mediums onto the wall? What gives anyone the desire to put tags on walls and subway cars? Who understands the true motives of these works--but can the works still resonate in the speculations of what this truth was? Painters believe in the order which they create. It locates a specific moment of focus, and records it as an outward act. This outward act initiates a new experience in the viewer.

Barnett Newman wrote in "The First Man was an Artist" that painting is an emotional act. It satisfied a desire to communicate. As a community animal, man needs the contact with the actions of his fellow man. But as an individual, not all of these words are created to be spoken clearly in public. Some require mystery for their phrasing to maintain potency.

But emotional release is not the sole purpose of painting. Sunday painters must find great reward in their efforts. But those who strive to be artists must justify their calling. As a result of a specialization of labor, not every individual is involved solely in the process of initiating art works. It is an obligation of the artist, in the fulfillment of this role (which removes them from the material productive process), to create works which serve the whole of society in some manner. The artist cannot be selfish in outlook. Granted that the search is often individual, but the final result is to be placed upon the wall for a greater experience or communication. It is the obligation of the artist to ensure that the result will suffice as worthy for the collective.

Thus content matters. Content in art is often a product of its time, although not exclusively of it. Content should represent a dialogue rather than an allegiance. This dialogue must be generated from within the artist. Andre Derain's work stagnated in a tribute to the classical spirit. Paul Eluard seemed happy to become a Red Patsy in his later poetry. Their inward drives dissipated to genuflection to outside points-of-view.

In regards to content, Emile Zola argued that works of art should be indicative of their time. There is a truth in this in that the time period provides a context for the nature of existence of the creator. But it should only be a framework (being a time capsule is not being an artist). Even Zola fought to escape the mere capsulistic role which he attributed to his work. How could he then still attribute a mere role of outward recording to the artist figure in his novel Paris as he himself sought higher ends? Merely recording the present is condemning one's work to the past.

The order inherent in the act of painting is a result of conditioning. Automatism functioned both in Surrealism and Existentialism as a conditioned act in order for it to be beneficial. The initiator of the experience was aware of how the process worked although he or she was not yet aware of the result. Zen and Chan works operate on the idea that the creator manipulates a work at the apex of experience into a state which transcends the limitations of the individual. Van Gogh would speak of his period at Arles as a time of heightened awareness and

nerves. Each of these are moments in which the individual reaches energy larger than the normal energies which belong to oneself.

This idea of the experience is not new. It is not as mysterious as it seems either for these mechanisms are only attempts to break the cycle of schematic thinking in order to reach something pure and original (the attributes by which Surrealism characterized the unconscious and by which Dada condemned a tired Western culture). But it is up to the individual to determine how this state of originality may be attained or served.

I do not believe in the Romantic idea that the artist is involved in a glorious struggle and in which the works should be prized as triumphs of this struggle. This is only an image and an argument which often only justifies crap. Furthermore, works deserve no more attribution than they possess (being only worked surfaces). The fight belongs to quality of the work, not to the struggle of the individual (or the mythology around the creation of the work) for in the end only the product remains. The individual dies away. The goal is to create a functioning oeuvre of work, not to create an artist's mythological story.

So wherein lies the nature of painting? Painting serves as documentation in its most basic sense. It documents what was inputted into and manipulated upon the painting's surface. It is a conclusion of a struggle with materials and of rationalizing the composition from within the mind. But documents are not holy objects, they are only paperwork. Keep in mind that all of the arguments were lived. But the best works remain to remind us of the best arguments. One hopes, at least, that this ideal actually functions in practice.

Artists struggle to remain productive and to maintain a methodology of production. Even a secure person such as the iconic elder Picasso found a struggle in that he did not think that he could produce enough work. Sometimes the production of work itself is a struggle. Whether it was Jean Michel Basquiat or Picasso in warring Paris--that works are produced is a tribute to order and existence.

Painting is the most effective medium because it is the most direct. It allows one fluidity or rigidity. It is simply moving stuff around. As such, it allows the strongest mark of the individual. Although Post-Modernism has attempted to hide this mark (and even Medieval works sought to hide this mark in attempts to evoke the spiritual), the approach to the picture plane itself is a fingerprint.

Painting is effective because it is permanent. Forget the standards of millenniums, centuries are a benchmark. Lascaux and the Sistine Chapel still remain. Performance works are not permanent. But their mission is not to make a mark of the human action. As painting has the ability to do so, a greater gravity is evoked. As for photography and computers, these devices are instruments of technology. Technology itself is dated. Painting has been around for thousands of years. It will remain--it is as basic as water and it will not become obsolete.

The results of painting function as documentation. The act of painting functions as transcription. The Chinese view is as such. Whether it be textual calligraphy with a worded communication or a rendered image, the result of each is a transcription of ideas expressed by the individual. Each offer documentation of a different nature. The fact that the appearance of each differs does not matter. It is only the core function and actions of each which matter. Styles should not be the goal of art but rather conceptually driven communication.

The ever-present hostility to art is complacency. Art created to be art is academic. Art

should be created to be new and fresh. Art created to only express is lackadaisical. Art should be created to reach beyond the mere words of the individual. Art must always relate. The Futurists, Dada, and early Surrealism best realized the mission of art as being the new, as being the goal to attain free rein.

Art is only produced out of jarring or unions with forces involved in paradigms. It is the duty of the artist to continually find a place within this arena on which to stand and state, "I am, I acted."

### Postulations for Surviving Post-Modernism.

\* Chinese art stagnated because the artists became more concerned with the forms involved rather than with the furtherment of the drive which had initiated these forms in the past. The art became a contest for the mastery of technique as opposed to a development of content in concert with a mastery of method. Academic art is in fact any art which concerns itself mostly with a mastery of technique (on the premise that the drive for concept has already been furthered en masse by the group). Academic art is perfection of a discovery without the worrying of initiating new ground. Worries about polishing methodology must never be mistaking for worries about whether a new form contains within its own workings a valid rationality for its claim to be art.

Western art had experienced this problem with Abstract Expressionism. Motherwell's Je t'aime series was a reaction to what had become a complacent abstractionism. It is always a worry when the methods of the avant-garde become a mere badge which followers wave in order to only show off their credentials.

\* That work is not created simply for the act of creating or simply because the creator wishes to act upon the talents of his or her techniques.

\* That work exists in rationality: i.e. cognizance of the act committed without any undue attribution to the worth of this act.

\* That work be created by individuals who realize that they have assumed a creative role within the society. But whom still realize that they are workers upon a par with any other member of the society--only that each function in a different role.

\* That work displays an awareness of the work of the past and of the value of this work. This is only to have importance as an aspect of conditioning rather than of replication. Art must continue to innovate although it will always be a member of the same organism.

\* True art will always continue to align to the concept of free rein. While separate works or bodies of works may exist to argue or satisfy the parameters of a particular conflict, the oeuvre of art must still contain a sensibility of art. Art must never fall into a role which only satisfies the objectives of illustrating a particular program.

\* Art must contribute to the organism of the society--whether by complimenting it or

antagonizing it. Because it consumes the materials and time (energies) of the society, it must have worth to the society. It is the responsibility of the artist rather than of the society to ascertain this worth.

\* Art must be defined as an act of initiation. If the purpose of art is not to initiate further action then it is only entertainment and a blasphemy.

On ne saurait decrire en art  
L'engin a prendre le renard bleu

In art one can hardly describe  
The device for catching the blue fox

Andre Breton

Nor should anyone wish to.